

# THE SENSE OF *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

by William Bowman Piper

## I. THE SENSE OF THINGS

Jonathan Swift's *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* has always had a more uniform and reliable impact on its readers than it has on its critics. Readers of varying abilities and different persuasions all seem to laugh at the Emperor's claim that his head strikes against the sun, at Gulliver's leap over the cow dung, and at the musical meats of the Laputians; to shudder at the King's judgment of civilized human life; and to complain about the Emperor's "lenity" toward Gulliver and about Gulliver's condescension toward Pedro de Mendez. We suffer a wide and shifting variety of feelings as readers of the *Travels*, but we suffer more or less together. The minute we begin to discuss our feelings, however, the minute we try to categorize or formulate or otherwise subject the range of responses we have all been led through in reading Swift's book, the minute we attempt to reduce to some manageable discursive system all he has made us experience and observe, we make statements of hopeless diversity and contrariness. One critic argues that the Houyhnhnms are exemplary human figures, for example, another that they are objects of derision: both positions can be extensively substantiated it seems; and both can attract a body of respectable supporters. Similarly, Gulliver is described by some critics as a sensible if stolid man, by others as a gull, and by others as a maniac. Yet I believe all these critics, while reading the book, have laughed at the same places and, in places where they could not laugh, have suffered from very similar agonies of personal implication.

What divides us in general argument after we have been united in particular response is, surely, the fact of argument itself, the effort, that is, to formulate, to generalize. Swift has drawn us through what he himself characterized as "a series of observations on the imperfections, the follies, and the vices of man." He has presented us a series of sharply separate voyages and, within each of these, a long series of discrete events, discussions, meditations, and descriptions. And strongly aided by the mere necessity of reading serially, that is, of reading through one voyage and one adventure and one sentence at a time, we have proceeded with an initially good, an initially sharable,

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understanding of things, one thing at a time. But when we attempt to describe an encompassing pattern and to enunciate a general argument, we suppress or falsify or, at least, slight certain aspects of our total experience of the book, certain elements in Gulliver's performance and his account—each of us probably slighting rather a different set of our feelings and a different set of Swift's circumstances. We differ in our efforts to generalize the *Travels*, then, because to generalize its radically diverse and discrete materials is to falsify them; and one false generalization is pretty much as good, as subject to critical demonstration, as another.

The *Travels* resists generalization. In its organization and in its nature it observes the great principle of English philosophical thought, that everything which exists exists in particular. This principle was indicated by Bacon and affirmed by Locke; it is explicitly embraced by the infamous Hobbes and by the pious Berkeley. Since it is an inescapable corollary to the dependence on sense experience, it dwells at the center of English empiricism. Bacon, the first great spokesman of this movement, attacked the way of searching into truth which "flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles, the truth of which it takes for settled and immovable, proceeds to judgment and to the discovery of middle axioms"; he advocated, rather, the inductive study which "derives axioms from the senses and particulars, rising by a gradual and unbroken ascent, so that it arrives at the most general axioms last of all." "This is the true way," Bacon insists, "but as yet untried." Such an inductive procedure seems to me to be the true way of studying the *Travels* too, although it is for the most part, to follow Bacon a little further, as yet untried.<sup>1</sup>

That students of the *Travels* should try this way Swift has variously indicated, signaling throughout his book the seriatim, piece-meal nature of its materials. There is, first, the fact of the book's four separate voyages, each of them presenting us with experiences strikingly different both from anything we ordinarily know and from one another, and each one separated from the others by the descriptions of Gulliver's voyaging and by being put in its own separate "Part." When Gulliver briefly considers the first and second Parts together, he does so to insist on their crucial point of difference:

I could not forbear thinking of *Lilliput*, whose Inhabitants looked upon me as the greatest Prodigy that ever appeared in the World; where I was able to draw an Imperial Fleet in my Hand, and perform those other Actions which will be recorded for ever in the Chronicles of that Empire, while Posterity shall hardly believe them, although attested by Millions. I reflected what a Mortification it must prove to me to appear as inconsiderable in this Nation, as one single *Lilliputian* would be among us.<sup>2</sup>

We may decide to reject this little meditation as the sheer product of Swift's *Splendide Mendax*,<sup>3</sup> since Gulliver represents himself as entertaining it at the moment when a Brobdingnagian peasant was about to step on him. But through it Swift has informed us that the kind of experiences Gulliver will

have in Brobdingnag—or the kind of lies he will make up about it—are and must be tremendously different from those of Lilliput.

The voyage to Laputa is not only distinct from the other three voyages, but it is in itself an apparently disjunctive affair, a series of sharply distinctive and sharply distinguished experiences. Gulliver does attribute the experimental efforts in the Balnibarbian city of Lagado to a visit some of its citizens once made to Laputa. And truly, the abstract rationalism of the one place has affinities with the physical imposition of abstract systems of thought practiced in the other. But the many separate experiments Gulliver describes in the academy at Lagado are, nevertheless, remarkably different from anything in Laputa; each of them is, moreover, quite clearly distinct from the others—some being hopelessly silly and futile, others hopelessly sensible. And each of the visits to Maldonada, Luggnagg, Glubbudbrib, and Japan, with which the third voyage is concluded, presents us with a set of quite separate circumstances.

The *Travels* gives many other signs of its essentially disjunctive nature besides and before the voyage to Laputa. The prevailing narrative or chronological movement, for example, is continuously interspersed with such other kinds of discourse as descriptions, conversations, dissertations, and meditations. And the narrative material itself is disjunctive and atomistic. One thinks, for example, of the exposition of Gulliver's encounters with animals in Brobdingnag, encounters between which there is virtually no narrative continuity. Some of these are introduced simply, "Another day," "One day," "Another time"; others are brought forth as affording a rhetorical climax of some kind: "That which gave me the most uneasiness"; "But the greatest Danger." Many of what Gulliver calls his adventures are so discrete, so totally irrelevant to their context that they seem absurdly pointless—valuable to the narrator, we may imagine, merely because they happened. The great storm near the opening of the second voyage, for instance, merely blows furiously for a time and then, after a time, subsides. Again, there is the "adventure" of Gulliver's hat in Lilliput and, yet again, the accident that befell him there during his journey inland:

About four Hours after we began our Journey, I awaked by a very ridiculous Accident; for the Carriage being stopt a while to adjust something that was out of Order, two or three of the young Natives had the Curiosity to see how I looked when I was asleep; they climbed up into the Engine, and advancing very softly to my Face, one of them, an Officer in the Guards, put the sharp End of his Half-Pike a good way up into my left Nostril, which tickled my Nose like a Straw, and made me sneeze violently: Whereupon they stole off unperceived; and it was three Weeks before I knew the Cause of my awaking so suddenly.

There it is: it has no importance now and, despite the hint to the contrary in the last clauses, no later repercussions—a mere circumstance in Gulliver's persistently circumstantial narration.

The *Travels* is loosely composed throughout. In among the encounters with animals described in Chapter 5 of Part II, which is one of the most nearly unified chapters in the whole book, there are a couple of paragraphs on the maids of honor, a couple on the dwarf, a hail storm, and the leap over the cow dung. Moreover, two or three other encounters with the dwarf, that "malicious cub," are reported elsewhere; and there are several other brief meetings with animals of Brobdingnag, rats, flies, wasps, whales, and an eagle, scattered here and there throughout the voyage. The sixth chapter of the first voyage, to notice a more loosely organized chapter, opens by describing a wide variety of Lilliputian customs—with something on burial customs, something on methods of education, and other such topics. Half-way through the chapter, however, Gulliver turns, merely because "it may perhaps divert the curious Reader," to some aspects of his own life in Lilliput. Then, after describing his manner of eating, he gives an account of a banquet at which he entertained the Emperor. Right after this, he acknowledges the scandal that had linked him to Flimnap's wife—Flimnap's presence at the banquet having served, we may surmise, to bring this to his mind—and defends himself against this scandal.

Gulliver's transitions between one thing and another are prevailingly loose. We have noted some of them already: that what he is turning to may divert the reader, that it happened on another day, that it was the best or worst thing of that kind that befell him. Often one sort of material will merely stop—apparently having been exhausted for that time—and another will follow.

Consider, for example, this shift between Gulliver's entertainment of the ambassadors from Blefuscu and his account of the fire at the Empress's palace:

The Reader may remember, that when I signed those Articles upon which I recovered my Liberty, there were some which I disliked upon Account of their being too servile, neither could any thing but an extreme Necessity have forced me to submit. But being now a *Nardac*, or the highest Rank in that Empire, such Offices were looked upon as below my Dignity; and the Emperor (to do him Justice) never once mentioned them to me. However, it was not long before I had an Opportunity of doing his Majesty, at least, as I then thought, a most signal Service.

We may possibly observe, by recognizing that Gulliver gave political offense both by his courtesy to the ambassadors, the account of which precedes this passage, and by his manner of rendering this "signal Service," how absurdly disparate and miscellaneous are the elements that can cause a courtier to rise or fall. But Gulliver does not make this observation: these two elements are joined, like so many in his account, entirely, as it seems, by accident.

Consider, again, this complete paragraph, which opens the third chapter of the voyage to Lilliput:



[1] My Gentleness and good Behaviour had gained so far on the Emperor and his Court, and indeed upon the Army and People in general, that I began to conceive Hopes of getting my Liberty in a short Time. [2] I took all possible Methods to cultivate this favourable Disposition. [3] The Natives came by Degrees to be less apprehensive of any Danger from me. [4] I would sometimes lie down, and let five or six of them dance on my Hand. [5] And at last the Boys and Girls would venture to come and play at Hide and Seek in my Hair. [6] I had now made a good Progress in understanding and speaking their Language. [7] The Emperor had a mind one Day to entertain me with several of the Country Shows; wherein they exceed all Nations I have known, both for Dexterity and Magnificence. [8] I was diverted with none so much as that of the Rope-Dancers, performed upon a slender white Thread, extended about two Foot, and twelve Inches from the Ground. [9] Upon which, I shall desire Liberty, with the Reader's Patience, to enlarge a little.

The second through fifth sentences follow the first clearly enough, serving to explain and to exemplify the assertion made in it. But the sixth sentence, that about Gulliver's progress in learning the language, has no connection either backward or forward. Nor do the last three sentences, which form a unit in themselves, connect in any binding way to the first five. Gulliver's paragraphs, as this one shows, are subject to the same variousness of subject matter and the same disjunctiveness of composition as his chapters.

The *Travels* is not only loose in sequential movement; it is also loose, or better, perhaps, discontinuous in its fictions. The horse-shape of the Houyhnhnms, the smallness of the Lilliputians, the largeness of the Brobdingnagians, and the opinionative and active presences of Gulliver are all subject to being de-emphasized or dismissed altogether at their author's convenience and then, as that changes, to being reasserted. The smallness of the Lilliputians, for example, is not only irrelevant to their political squabbles, except for incidental touches in the exposition of them, but it would actually blunt the satiric point of these squabbles, that is, their fundamental similarity to *our* political squabbles. Of course, the Lilliputian smallness is always accessible to Swift when it will allow him to underline a satiric implication. Consider this passage:

It is alledged indeed, that the high Heels are most agreeable to our ancient Constitution: But however this be, his Majesty hath determined to make use of only low Heels in the Administration of the Government, and all Offices in the Gift of the Crown; as you cannot but observe; and particularly, that his Majesty's Imperial Heels are lower at least by a *Drurr* than any of his Court; (*Drurr* is a Measure about the fourteenth Part of an Inch.) The Animosities between these two Parties run so high, that they will neither eat nor drink, nor talk with each other. We compute the *Tramecksan*, or High-Heels, to exceed us in Number; but the Power is wholly on our Side. We apprehend his Imperial Highness, the Heir to the Crown, to have some Tendency towards the High-Heels; at least we can plainly discover one of his Heels higher than the other; which gives him a Hobble in his Gait.

Whatever may be the relevance of this passage to contemporary English politics—and far too much has been made of this, it seems to me—its relevance to persistent political practices throughout our civilization is painfully

evident. We can find corresponding cases of political affiliation and political rivalry in today's newspaper. The Lilliputian attribution of these particular practices, while usually submerged, is selectively asserted: "as you cannot but observe"; "at least by a *Drurr*"; "about the fourteenth Part of an Inch." These passing references to Lilliputian proportions allow Swift to deepen his revelation of the pettiness of *our* political practices, but only if we have neglected and continue to neglect the Lilliputian difference from us in the rest of the passage—neglect the difference so that we can attend to the similarity. We may also recall the shifting use Swift makes of Gulliver in his exposition of the experiments in Lagado: in some cases the narrator responds foolishly; in at least one, the case of the medicinal bellows, he responds sensibly; and in several he simply fades away—being used in every case to allow Swift to achieve the most vivid satiric point.

The looseness with which Swift has connected the segments of the *Travels* and the shiftiness with which he employs its fictional properties should continuously prompt us to take up this book one circumstance at a time or, more precisely, to scan it throughout with an analytical eye, continuously prepared, that is, to anatomize the flow of Gulliver's exposition and the facts of his experience.

I do not mean to say that the separate elements of Gulliver's account should not be tested together, only that the special qualities, the particular nature, of each must be digested for any combination—any pattern of likenesses, differences, chronology, or causality—to be safely or fruitfully considered. Gulliver's horror of killing or enslaving all the Blefuscudians, for example; his approval of Lord Munodi's methods of farming; his disgust with the Laputans; his explanation to the Houyhnhnm Master of English nobility; and his admission that the King of Brobdingnag was a prince of excellent understanding: all these attitudes and assertions may finally and forever seem to constitute a body of Gulliverian good sense and good judgment. But none of Gulliver's statements or actions should pass simply because we have on other occasions found him to be a reliable reporter or a sensible judge, or because this attitude or assertion has been sanctioned by some other figure of professed authority, or because its English seems good, or because its rhetoric is impressive. Every moment in the book and every discursive pattern made up of separate moments must endure the test of sense on its own merits.

We will no doubt accept many of the claims of causality, similarity, and other relationships that Gulliver makes. Not only that, but we may often see patterns that Gulliver ignores. The charge of adultery against Gulliver in Lilliput, to give an easy case, might recall to our minds: the first occasion of his making water in that land; the admiring glances upward of the Lilliputian soldiery as they marched in parade under his outspread legs; and his recently described attack on the palace fire. Gulliver does not recall any of these

experiences when he faces the libelous allegations against his honor and the virtue of Flimnap's lady, but our recollections of them will surely lead us to be more sensible in facing this painful and politically perilous occasion than Gulliver is. Again, when the Houyhnhnm Master takes exception to Gulliver's "fore-feet" as appendages useless for locomotion, we may recall the recent uses Gulliver *has* made of them in Houyhnhnm-land, in trapping game, in making bread, and in dressing and undressing—the latter action recently accomplished, as Gulliver has told us, beneath the close scrutiny of the Master. We may later recall the Master's statement, moreover, when we read how the Houyhnhnms "use the hollow Part between the Pastern and the Hoof of their Fore-feet as we do our Hands, and this with greater Dexterity, than I could at first imagine." What, we may ask in passing, would Gulliver have imagined at first; what original idea of the dexterity horses might achieve with their front hooves underlies his present admiration? At any rate, by keeping all these references to hands and fore-feet together and by referring them to our own experience of these appendages, we should be able to make a sensible judgment of the Master's statement.

There are many analogous events occurring at widely separated points in the *Travels*, most of them unacknowledged by Gulliver. One thinks, for example, of Gulliver's meals as described in the first, second, third, and fourth voyages, of the studies he makes of his own image in the second and fourth, of his conduct on returning home after each voyage, and of his political conversations in Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and Houyhnhnm-land. Looking beyond Gulliver, there is the King of Brobdingnag, who reveals a sensible and well-balanced human intelligence, a mind responsive to experience and capable of judgment, in every significant appearance he makes. It was the King, we may remember, who in response to Gulliver's copious description of English politics, took him up in his right hand, and "stroaking me gently with the other; after an hearty Fit of laughing, asked me whether I were a *Whig* or a *Tory*."

The passage that introduces the King and describes his first seeing Gulliver gives an excellent example of the empirical, the sensible, mind at work. The King tries to fit Gulliver, this strikingly unusual phenomenon, first into one frame of his past experience and then into another, maintaining and at the same time clarifying the sense of human life and nature he has built up in the past while responding adequately and precisely to this new and generally upsetting experience. He first sees the tiny figure of Gulliver lying face down in the Queen's hand and mistakes him for a splacknuck (a Brobdingnagian "Animal," as Gulliver has reported, of about his size and, he assures us, "very finely shaped"). Then when the Queen sets Gulliver down and he begins to walk erect, the King "conceived I might be a piece of Clockwork, (which is in that Country arrived to a very great Perfection)." Gulliver has apparently thrown in the fact on Brobdingnagian expertise in clock-work manufacture,

to which he never alludes again, merely as another fact; but from it we may infer that the King's mistake was a sensible one: he had seen "finely shaped" splacknucks, and he had seen tiny clock-work men who could strut around in convincingly human style. But when Gulliver speaks and, further, when he responds intelligibly to a variety of searching questions the King puts to him, the King further modifies his thinking. Unlike the Brobdingnagian scholars, the King recognizes the tremendous importance of this verbal and ratiocinative capacity. He is sensibly astonished, and, after the scientists have their futile say, he does some more research, calling the farmer from whom the Queen had purchased Gulliver and questioning him first privately and then before Gulliver and Glumdalclitch. Then he makes sure that this oddity is well attended to, obviously planning further observation. The good sense the King shows here is strengthened in each of his significant appearances, giving in final effect an impression of powerful and dependable human intelligence. It is this impression which makes his indictment of European civilization, an indictment he is led to by a careful sifting of Gulliver's testimony on the subject, so impressive and, indeed, devastating. Gulliver, it may be worth mentioning, does not himself have a perfectly coherent impression of the King's intellect, sometimes praising him, sometimes patronizing him, and sometimes being obviously astonished by him. But in the King's character we should surely see a consistent pattern, a coherent system of conduct, which Gulliver has missed.

For a more complex pattern, which also lies outside the awareness of the narrator, consider Gulliver's two approaches to alien land in Part IV, first, his entry into what is later revealed to be Houyhnhnmland and, second, his coming upon another unknown shore after his exile. In both these cases Gulliver advanced cautiously, in full command of his senses; in both cases he expected to meet primitive peoples and chiefly feared the bow and arrow—we may recall that the first "human creature" he saw in Lilliput had a bow and arrow in his hands. In the first case, however, Gulliver encountered those singularly deformed creatures, the Yahoos, whose physiognomy he observed very closely and with great disgust from behind a thicket. The reception they gave him is worth recalling here. After watching herds of them, some in a field and a few sitting in trees, he met one in a roadway; and when "the ugly Monster . . . lifted up his fore Paw," Gulliver hit it with the flat of his hanger, so as not to provoke "the Inhabitants" of the place by actually wounding "their Cattle." "The Beast . . . roared so loud that a Herd of at least forty came flocking about me . . . howling and making odious faces." Then followed the adventure before a large tree during which "Several of this cursed Brood getting hold of the Branches behind, leaped up into the Tree, from whence they began to discharge their Excrements on my head."

Now compare that reception with this equally unfriendly one Gulliver received in a land some days' voyage away from the Houyhnhnms:

I saw twenty or thirty Natives upon a Height, not above five hundred Yards from me. They were stark naked, Men, Women and Children round a Fire, as I could discover by the Smoke. One of them spied me, and gave Notice to the rest; five of them advanced towards me, leaving the Women and Children at the Fire. I made what haste I could to the Shore, and getting into my Canoo, shoved off: The Savages observing me retreat, ran after me; and before I could get far enough into the Sea, discharged an Arrow, which wounded me deeply on the Inside of my left Knee (I shall carry the Mark to my Grave.) I apprehended the Arrow might be poisoned; and paddling out of the Reach of their Darts (being a calm Day) I made a shift to suck the Wound, and dress it as well as I could.

Gulliver had been looking for "Savages" when he first ran into the Yahoos; now he encounters savages indeed, that is, of course, a savage human community in which he detects, even from five hundred yards away, "Men, Women and Children round a Fire." This society has specialized tasks for its constituent membership, the men being obviously the warriors—or would Gulliver prefer us to say hunters? They really possess that sophisticated weapon, the bow and arrow, which the men know only too well how to handle and discharge. And the society clearly enjoys a precise mode of informing and organizing its membership, of giving notice. Recognizing the tremendous differences between the unfriendly Yahoos and these unfriendly people of the most primitive level of human life, we should be well equipped to judge Gulliver's detestation of what he calls "European Yahoos," a detestation he reveals in the paragraph immediately after that recounting his encounter with the savages, and his admission to the kindly, amused Portuguese seamen, in the next paragraph following, that he is himself "a poor Yahoo."

There are many other patterns that we can discern in the varieties of Gulliver's voyages. The proper Laputans, for example, are almost everywhere (except in a brief political allegory) insensibly rationalistic beings; and the proper Yahoos are almost always brutal and disgusting. But no general pattern, no coherency of connection nor any consistency of being, can safely be allowed until we have tested it analytically, part by part, and made sure that—and how—the parts really do fit. In coping with life we need to make such a self-conscious resort to the sense of things only on occasion; in coping with most literary works, even less; but in trying to understand Swift's *Travels*, we must keep our sense constantly on the alert.

## II. THE SENSE OF WORDS

Arriving at sensible judgments while reading the *Travels* requires us to make two different kinds of discriminations at once, first, concerning facts and experience and, second, concerning words and language. George Berkeley, the philosopher, who was a friend of Swift, recognized in the famous Introduction to his *Principles of Human Knowledge* this two-fold problem of reading sensibly and implored his audience to read *through* his

words down to the ideas and notions which underlay them. He did everything in his power as a literary stylist, moreover, to aid readers in this necessary translation, attempting to make his language, as it were, perfectly transparent. Swift, who knew Berkeley's work, had long been concerned with the same problem, that is, the problem of getting ideas from one mind into another by the use of words.<sup>4</sup> However, the confusion of word and thing, the misrepresentation of common things with uncommon usages of language and of uncommon things with common usages, which Berkeley always avoided, provides many of the literary qualities, many of the challenges to sense, in the *Travels*.

Swift has given many signs that discrepancies between Gulliver's language and Gulliver's experiences are possible and that we should be alert for them. The *Travels* is, for one thing, full of explicit acknowledgments of problems that arise from differences of language. Gulliver gives many translations from the Lilliputian, Brobdingnagian, and other tongues, and many etymologies. We may recall, for instance, his ingenious derivation of "Laputa," his dissertation on "lenity," his explanation of the terms "Grildrig" and "Glumdalclitch," and his discussion of the expression "to lick the Dust before his [the King of Luggnagg's] Footstool." There are also the English renderings from the Lilliputian of the report on Gulliver's possessions, of the document by which he regained his freedom, and of the articles of impeachment against him. The Emperor's assertion of dominion in the second of these documents, in which Gulliver explains to us that "five Thousand Blustrugs" amount to "about twelve Miles in Circumference," and the whole of the description of Gulliver's possessions should warn us of the ways in which language can disguise and conceal facts.

Consider the Houyhnhnm term for "to die." As Gulliver explains, "rendered into *English*, it signifies, 'to retire to his first Mother'." Swift forces us to test this explanation, to decide from our own experience and understanding of death whether we are satisfied with this use of "to die" and with the attitude towards mortality that accompanies it:

If they can avoid Casualties, they die only of old Age, and are buried in the obscurest Places that can be found, their Friends and Relations expressing neither Joy nor Grief at their Departure; nor does the dying Person discover the least Regret that he is leaving the World, any more than if he were upon returning home from a visit to one of his Neighbours: I remember, my Master having once made an Appointment with a Friend and his Family to come to his House upon some Affair of Importance; on the Day fixed, the Mistress and her two Children came very late; she made two Excuses, first for her Husband, who, as she said, happened that very Morning to *Lhnwvnh*: the word is strongly expressive in their Language, but not easily rendered into *English*; it signifies, *to retire to his first Mother*. Her Excuse for not coming sooner, was, that her Husband dying late in the Morning, she was a good while consulting her Servants about a convenient Place where his Body should be laid; and I observed she behaved herself at our House, as cheerfully as the rest: She died about three Months after.<sup>5</sup>



Although he has elsewhere brought in his English experience to correct the Master's understanding of the term "*Nobility*," Gulliver is apparently satisfied with this Houyhnhnm understanding of death. But the very use of the English terms "dying" and "died" may recall our own human experiences of the mystery and finality of death and cause us to doubt the Houyhnhnms' good sense or, at least, to acknowledge a tremendous and irremediable gap between the way a truly rational quadruped might face death and the way we human beings do.

The *Travels* is full of imperfect, unsatisfactory, or confused translations. There are in the very opening pages of the book, for example, the carelessly withheld translations for the Lilliputian expressions, "*Hekinah Degul*" and "*Langro Dehul san*." There is, again, the mountainous gobbledygook of the writing machine in Balnibarbi, the use in Brobdingnag of the empty expression "*Relplum Scalcaeth*," and the failure of many English terms in Houyhnhnm-land. Consider this great list of European vices as Gulliver reels them off before the Master:

... in order to feed the Luxury and Intemperance of the Males, and the Vanity of the Females, we sent away the greatest Part of our necessary Things to other Countries, from whence in Return we brought the Materials of Diseases, Folly, and Vice, to spend among ourselves. Hence it follows of Necessity, that vast Numbers of our People are compelled to seek their Livelihood by Begging, Robbing, Stealing, Cheating, Pimping, Forswearing, Flattering, Suborning, Forging, Gaming, Lying, Fawning, Hectoring, Voting, Scribbling, Stargazing, Poysoning, Whoring, Canting, Libelling, Free-thinking, and the like Occupations: Every one of which Terms, I was at much Pains to make him understand.

The last statement should remind us of the remarkable naïveté of the Master, of his total lack of the body of experiences to which each of these terms refers. The result is, as so often in the *Travels*, ambivalent. On the one hand, we are probably struck, by checking these terms against the Master's virtuous innocence, at the range and the irrationality of human vice; on the other hand, we must surely laugh at the confusion of mind that we can imagine Gulliver to beget in this quadruped acquaintance of his with these wild and whirling words—and at Gulliver too, perhaps, who has been so carried away by his recollection of these vicious European practices that he has, at least for the moment, completely forgotten, first, the limitations of the Master's experience and, second, the intellectual and social responsibilities a speaker has to use language always to address and to inform his hearers.

Consider, finally, Gulliver's telling the Portuguese seamen that he is "a poor *Yahoo*, banished from the *Houyhnhnms*." The Portuguese seamen naturally laugh at Gulliver for proclaiming his identity with Yahoos in a tone "which resembled the Neighing of a Horse." But they cannot know the full absurdity of the statement, because, of course, they do not know what "Yahoo" or what "Houyhnhnm" refer to. They have no experiences to



attach to these key terms of Gulliver's assertion. Gulliver had the sense to address them in their own tongue but not the sense to see that the foreign terms he interpolated into it must render it meaningless to them, and his use of their language, futile. They recognize that Gulliver is speaking Portuguese, but they have no idea what he is saying. We may decide that, under the circumstances, this is just as well.

These linguistic puzzles, difficulties, and confusions should keep us alert to the continuous possibility of discrepancies in Gulliver's account between words and things, between what we read and what Gulliver saw or did, between what Gulliver reports that he did or said or saw and what we can imagine.

But, surely, someone will here object, Swift's language in *Gulliver's Travels* is the most lucid exercise in English that our literature can show; surely it is, as much as Addison's and Berkeley's, the language of common sense. That is true. Gulliver does practice the "good neat style" that Dr. Johnson has commended. His reader, to use Johnson again, needs "little previous knowledge [except for] common words and common things"; and English, when it is produced in this way, does provide in itself a great repository of common sense.

Berkeley both insisted on this and exploited it. If he could square his tenets with common ways of speaking, he believed that he had successfully accommodated them to common ways of thinking. He deviated from common speech in his *Principles* and in his *Three Dialogues* only when he had to and then only with the most careful attention to maintaining common sense in other ways. In general, he strengthened the common-sense validity of his tenets by formulating them in the language of common English speech. The most ordinary term, like "cherry," as Berkeley knew and taught, represented a remarkably wide agreement among English-speaking people. It stood for an extensive exercise by each person in experience and reflection and for a wide and persistent practice of general communication. Every term a man used to think or to speak and many of his phrases and sentences stood on this great common-sense foundation. And, normally speaking, the more one came into line with common uses of terms, common arrangements of terms, and a transparently common mode of English utterance, the more firmly dependent on common sense one would be; the more likely one would be to say things that fit what other men had experienced and said, and the more likely one would be to gain their approval.

Swift, in confining Gulliver to common words and to conventional forms of expression, has thus erected his *Travels* on the same common-sense foundation that served Berkeley so well. The *Travels* is not, however, or, rather, may not be a common-sense document for all that. Berkeley used common English to acquaint his common English audience with the great body of natural and ordinary experiences they all shared or, now and then,

with experimental extensions of these. This natural, widely shared body of experiences was, after all, what he wished to explain. But in Gulliver's account of "*Several Remote Nations of the World*," Swift has confronted us with a body of experiences all of which have something odd about them. Thus the conventional language, which Berkeley used to persuade and to reassure the world, Swift uses to trick or to puzzle it.

Although each of Gulliver's travel experiences is strikingly remote from normal human experience in one respect or another, actually all of them are largely consonant with common human life, some being concerned with our fundamental physical necessities, others with our basic personal, social, and political relationships. The similarity between life in Lilliput and Brobdingnag and life in any other human community need not be labored; and even the Houyhnhnms, with their familial households, their employment of domestic animals, and their exaltation of friendship, truth, and reason, present a condition of life with which we can easily sympathize. Swift then describes situations which should be within the easy reach of ordinary readers in language which every one can follow; but the experiences and the language, the novelty of the first—even when that novelty is merely a matter of big men or little men—and the conventionality of the second are in conflict. Gulliver's easy and obvious discourse can at any moment lead an unwary reader into a foolish misapprehension of Gulliver's easy and obvious experiences. Indeed, the more common and reliable a word or expression is in accounting for conditions in *our* world, the more likely it is to present us with difficulties in grasping the remote worlds that Gulliver is trying to share with us. Thus the series of problems Swift has confronted us with by describing common human experiences in common English discourse constitutes a paradox of common sense.

### III. A FEW PARTICULAR JUDGMENTS

I propose that we face this paradox in the only way that will allow us a decent chance of coping with it successfully, that is, bit-by-bit, one passage, one sentence, and, when it becomes necessary, one phrase or word at a time. I propose, that is to say, that we study the *Travels* analytically, anatomically, in an intensified and self-conscious form of the way in which we read it, that way which has allowed, as I suggested earlier, at least a certain initial agreement among us.

This painstaking and slow-paced form of study has been generally indicated by many scholars. Denis Donoghue, for example, has recently insisted on the "thingy" particularity of Swift's work,<sup>6</sup> a descriptive point which agrees nicely with Kathleen Williams's advice to readers of the *Travels* that "we should keep close to experience . . . gained . . . from the senses and from reflection."<sup>7</sup> Professor Williams's statement may further remind us of Dr.

Johnson's suggestion, which I have already referred to, that the reader of Swift needs to bring with him into this writer's work only the common experiences of life and the common usages of the English language. Ellen Leyburn has made a point chiefly about the *Travels* that augments these: she showed that "Swift had an acute imagination; he could perceive 'absent things as if they were present'."<sup>8</sup> These scholars, taken together, point out the way I have proposed to follow in studying this work: we must bring our own accumulated sense, our experientially derived understanding, to bear on one "thingy" moment of the work at a time, trying in each case to test against our own experience and our own understanding of language what Gulliver is saying, what experiential objects and events he is referring to and how or how well these two, that is, his experiences and his language, fit together.

Still other critics, describing the *Travels* formally as a satire, have also implicitly suggested this close-grained, analytical attention by describing the work as a "farrago," and a "salmagundi," recalling aspects of the etymological background of the term "satire" indicative of stuffed variety.<sup>9</sup> Edward Rosenheim has similarly declared that "Swift rarely sustains a single ironic posture for long";<sup>10</sup> and Denis Donoghue has insisted on Swift's "loose" or "plural" form of composition.<sup>11</sup> To enforce this point Donoghue alludes to Swift's long discursive poems in octosyllabic couplets, poems that allowed Swift, as he suggests, tremendous liberty in general organization while providing for the narrowest definition and the narrowest scrutiny of parts. That such a style was produced by "a coldly intense scrutiny, a potentially hostile attention," F. R. Leavis has informed us;<sup>12</sup> and Dr. Johnson, similarly, as Frank Brady has noted, describes Swift's "vigilance of minute attention."<sup>13</sup> To read the *Travels* in the spirit in which it was written, then, as all these critics would surely advise, we must assume the same intellectual attitude.

The trouble is that heretofore few or no critics have followed up this true and valuable critical teaching. Critics have not, at least not in a formal and persistent and self-conscious way, bent themselves to the painstaking task of narrow and intense scrutiny. They have obviously been unwilling to postpone—or sacrifice entirely?—the exhilarating work of making and arguing general opinions. Not even the fine critics who have seen the need for such a slow-paced and narrow-gauged kind of study have been willing publicly to confine themselves for long to its obvious difficulties, perils, and frustrations. Let us, however, now do so or, rather, since in arguing for this course I have made a start on it, let us pursue it still further.<sup>14</sup>

Before our setting out, let me make a necessary apology. None of my analyses will be complete, or even approach completeness. This is due finally to the flickering, kaleidoscopic nature of the *Travels*, to the fact, that is, that almost every element in it, often down to the smallest detail, has not one meaning, but a range and variety of meanings or, rather, of possible mean-

ings. The Emperor's later conduct toward Gulliver, to touch on an easy case, is, if seen as allegorically representative, vicious and dreadful, if seen as a specific address to the Man-mountain, absurd and comical; and Swift gives us grounds for seeing it in both these ways. Again, although the Brobdingnagian scholars' examination of Gulliver is foolish and blind—blind despite their use of a magnifying glass; yet several of their particular observations make some painful sense. Not only that, but their final judgment of Gulliver, that he is a freak of nature, although apparently ridiculous, yet has affinities with some statements the sensible King will make and with such other considerable judgments as that by Alexander Pope that human-kind is the jest and riddle of the world. My analyses, then, will necessarily come to rest, no matter how far I push them, without having exhausted their subject matter. Some of my observations will seem obvious—at least to some readers; some will seem questionable. I hope and believe, nevertheless, that certain responses can be verified and that some agreements can be established. If I merely stir up an argument with respect to one passage or another, however, at least my reader and I will be arguing over some truly Swiftian matter; our attention will be focused where all useful understanding of the *Travels* must begin, on the details of this marvelously detailed creation.

For convenience we will first study a few of the sequences in Gulliver's account and then a few of its central terms.

Consider, first of all, the sequence in which Gulliver describes his adoption into the service of the Queen of Brobdingnag or, rather, a part of this sequence:

I then said to the Queen; since I was now her Majesty's most humble Creature and Vassal, I must beg the Favour, that *Glumdalclitch*, who had always tended me with so much Care and Kindness, and understood to do it so well, might be admitted into her Service, and continue to be my Nurse and Instructor. Her Majesty agreed to my Petition; and easily got the Farmer's Consent, who was glad enough to have his Daughter preferred at Court: And the poor Girl herself was not able to hide her Joy. My late Master withdrew, bidding me farewell, and saying he had left me in a good Service; to which I replied not a Word, only making him a slight Bow.

The Queen observed my Coldness; and when the Farmer was gone out of the Apartment, asked me the Reason.

The patronizing expression "poor Girl," the apparently normal request of a courtier to a new patroness, and the equally normal paternal attitude of the farmer, who might naturally be happy to have his daughter "preferred at Court," may have dulled our imaginative awareness of the extraordinary elements of this business, elements which, as the sensible Dr. Johnson might complain, are due entirely to big men and little men. Gulliver's language throughout is that which would be perfectly normal in describing a scene of courtly petition at, say, any European court. And the expression used to suggest Glumdalclitch's girlish pleasure, that she "was not able to hide her Joy," is the natural, transparent English expression for the occasion. But

when we recall that the little nurse's face must be roughly eight feet high and five or six across, we see that normal English usage can be absurd as a representation of Brobdingnagian actions: how indeed could joy that worked on such a countenance be hid from Gulliver?<sup>15</sup>

A little further on in this same passage occurs a more complex case of Gulliver's practice of normalizing the abnormal: his "slight Bow" of disdain toward the farmer. This subtly elegant and detached suggestion of contempt, especially in the light of Gulliver's new eminence, would have been perfectly proper if it had been directed at a French or German farmer who had abused him; but since this Brobdingnagian farmer looks almost straight down from sixty feet on a creature almost too small to be noticed from that distance, this modulation in the angle of Gulliver's bow, from the normal one of sincere politeness to this one of implicit contempt—not to speak of this feeling itself or, indeed, of any feelings for such a giant other than those of fear or apprehension—is futile, nonsensical. Swift has prefigured the absurdity of this normal European gesture by describing Gulliver, just a few sentences prior to it, in a gesture absurdly but necessarily abnormal: "I fell on my Knees, and begged the Honour of kissing her [the Queen's] Imperial Foot; but this Gracious Princess held out her little Finger towards me (after I was set on a table) which I embraced in both my Arms, and put the Tip of it, with the utmost Respect, to my Lip."<sup>16</sup>

But the matter of the slight bow does not end with the bow itself. No sooner do we laugh at the absurd arrogance of Gulliver's attitude and at the impossibility of its being noticed, than we are told that the Queen *did* notice it: she "observed my Coldness." Swift's giving us not the Queen's physical perception of the slightness of this miniature bow, but her social interpretation of this slightness, and a precisely correct interpretation at that, disguises the fact of it. But this perception, which we have just laughed at as an impossibility, must underly the Queen's social observation; and it determines the course of the action. In the next sentences Gulliver tells us, he "made bold" to explain this coldness which she had observed. On this occasion, as on many others in the *Travels*, we must not only consider something closely but, having done so and having reached an understanding of it, we must consider it again and work toward still another understanding.

We may resolve the paradox of this passage by remembering that Gulliver may be a liar. I believe Swift spiced his book with this possibility, at least in part, for just such contradictions in Gulliver's account as this one. But to rest in that resolution of the paradox we must ignore the next sentences as purely false: the Queen could not see, hence did not ask, and hence did not get Gulliver's report. We do not in fact do this. We may, secondly, distrust our own senses or distrust, rather, the precision with which we exercise them and say, "Well, maybe if she looked closely, she could have detected the slightness of Gulliver's bow." Actually we have a multiple experience if we

read this passage in its full range: first we laugh at Gulliver's nonsensical pride, his failure to recognize his own size; a moment later, we laugh at Gulliver as a liar and then, as we read on, at ourselves for our excessive positiveness and for the uncertainty of our own most careful observations. Finally, as we proceed, we carry along a new sense of the remarkable similarity between Western civilization and Brobdingnag—a similarity that emerges from the Queen's correct interpretation of Gulliver's bow, a new sense of the one way in which Brobdingnag differs from our world, and a new sense of the difficulty of describing an action or event which deviates in even one way from those that make up our common experience and that inform our common use of language.

Gulliver's description of the Emperor of Lilliput presents a similar challenge to us:

He is taller by almost the Breadth of my Nail, than any of his Court; which alone is enough to strike an Awe into the Beholders. His Features are strong and masculine, with an *Austrian* Lip, and arched Nose, his Complexion olive, his Countenance erect, his Body and Limbs well proportioned, all his Motions graceful, and his Deportment majestic. He was then past his Prime, being twenty-eight Years and three Quarters old, of which he had reigned about seven, in great Felicity, and generally victorious. For the better Convenience of beholding him, I lay on my Side, so that my Face was parallel to his, and he stood but three Yards off: However, I have had him since many Times in my Hand, and therefore cannot be deceived in the Description.

Consider one aspect of the passage, the possibility that Gulliver could have seen what he describes. The Emperor, as Gulliver has told us, "kept beyond the Length of my Chains," and, further, "he stood but three Yards off." But could this six-inch mannikin be described down to his "*Austrian* Lip" and "arched Nose" from nine feet plus roughly six feet of height away? If Gulliver's cant praise of royalty, of European royalty, that is, does not dull our senses, we may, as in the passage on the slight bow, think that he is lying. The praise of the Emperor's agility, since Gulliver has seen him do nothing but nearly fall off his horse, seems empty and suspect; the precise catalogue of his features, pure imagination. But before we can settle into a firm distrust of Swift's *Splendide Mendax*, Gulliver informs us that he lay on his side "For the better Convenience of beholding him [the Emperor]." This actually acknowledges that we had grounds for suspicion, it seems to me, and thus hardens disbelief. But immediately follows the information that Gulliver has had the Emperor "many Times in my Hand," and that *this* is the basis of his descriptive precision. Thus the strongest indication that Gulliver is lying is immediately followed by virtual proof that he is not. But now we may surely fault the description in another way. Gulliver may, indeed, have seen the Emperor's tiny nose and lip—just as the Queen may have detected his own slight bow. But should one describe the features as royal and the deportment as majestic of any creature one can pick up in

his hand? Just who are the "Beholders" into whom such a height as the Emperor's—"almost the Breadth of my Nail" greater than his subjects—would by itself "strike an Awe?"

Let us now turn to a passage in which the questions of language and implicit intellectual attitude, rather than those more obvious ones of factual evidence and credibility, are of the first importance, the account of Gulliver's habitation in Lilliput:

At the Place where the Carriage stopt, there stood an ancient Temple, esteemed to be the largest in the whole Kingdom; which having been polluted some Years before by an unnatural Murder, was, according to the Zeal of those People, looked upon as Prophanes, and therefore had been applied to common Uses, and all the Ornaments and Furniture carried away. In this Edifice it was determined I should lodge. The great Gate fronting to the North was about four Foot high, and almost two Foot wide, through which I could easily creep. On each Side of the Gate was a small Window not above six Inches from the Ground; Into that on the Left Side, the King's Smiths conveyed four-score and eleven Chains, like those that hang to a Lady's Watch in *Europe*, and almost as large, which were locked to my Left Leg with six and thirty Padlocks. Over against this Temple, on the other Side of the great Highway, at twenty Foot Distance, there was a Turret at least five Foot high. Here the Emperor ascended with many principal Lords of his Court, to have an Opportunity of viewing me, as I was told, for I could not see them.

The passage may seem perfectly straightforward. The term "great Gate," for example, we accept as a natural Lilliputian designation for the main gate of their largest "Edifice"; no doubt Gulliver is merely translating a Lilliputian expression. Still we should keep in mind that the term "great" is English and carries its natural English congeries of meanings: so is the term "Edifice," the choosing of which we must surely attribute to Gulliver. But let us consider the gate, the dimensions of which the circumstantial narrator has given us: it was roughly four feet by two feet. Thus the "great Gate" of Lilliput is a mere sand-pile toy to us. But how does Gulliver present it?—as "almost," rather than "not quite" or "not even," two feet wide.

Gulliver describes his chains with similar admiration. They are "almost" as large as those "that hang to a Lady's Watch in *Europe*." And the turret, the many occupants of which were too small for Gulliver to see from twenty feet away, was "at least five Foot high." In such a context, the "small Window" at each side of the gateway constitutes a puzzle and a joke: "small" in whose language? If this is a translation, as we may take "great" to have been, then Gulliver must have had to take its use to hold "fourscore and eleven Chains" and, indeed, its existence—not to mention the exact number of those tiny chains—on Lilliputian report, on faith. Once again the shadow of mendacity falls over his account. But the cream of the passage is Gulliver's comfortable assertion that he could "easily creep" through the great gate. The adverb is, of course, Lilliputian—they could "easily" drive four chariots abreast through it, say; but "creep" is English or, better, the necessary use



of English to convey an inescapable fact of sense and experience. Gulliver, as his language reveals, has taken the Lilliputians' attitude toward the gate and his environs generally, in so far at least as his recalcitrant English size will allow. He shares their admiration at the size of the gate, the temple, and the turret, at the great bulk of his chains, at the spacious passage the gate allows. He reveals his absurd Lilliputian frame of mind, however, while furnishing the facts that allow us to reject and laugh at it.

This passage from the second voyage reveals a similar error in Gulliver's attitude, an error once again disguised or, if we see it, revealed by his use of language:

My Mistress had a Daughter of nine Years old, a Child of towardly Parts for her Age, very dextrous at her Needle, and skilful in dressing her Baby. Her Mother and she contrived to fit up the Baby's Cradle for me against Night: The Cradle was put into a small Drawer of a Cabinet, and the Drawer placed upon a hanging Shelf for fear of the *Rats*. This was my Bed all the Time I stayed with those People, although made more convenient by Degrees, as I began to learn their Language, and make my Wants known. This young Girl was so handy, that after I had once or twice pulled off my Cloaths before her, she was able to dress and undress me, although I never gave her that Trouble when she would let me do either my self. She made me seven Shirts, and some other Linnen of as fine Cloth as could be got, which indeed was coarser than Sackcloth; and these she constantly washed for me with her own Hands. She was likewise my School-Mistress to teach me the Language: When I pointed to any thing, she told me the Name of it in her own Tongue, so that in a few Days I was able to call for whatever I had a mind to. She was very good natured, and not above forty Foot high, being little for her Age.

The first sentence is conventional adult praise for a nine year old girl. The mention of her needle may make a vigilant reader wonder what this fearsome instrument must be, but the detail otherwise fits the adult, patronizing tone so well that it may pass unnoticed. The discrepancy between Gulliver's apparent adult superiority to Glumdalclitch and his actual physical dependence on her, however, can hardly be missed in the sentence on Gulliver's dressing himself. His praise of her youthful handiness conveys his attitude as the superior adult; the unconventionality of the task that she is so quick in mastering and her obvious power to perform it, despite Gulliver's efforts to maintain his adult independence and masculine honor, reveal his actual inferiority. We may notice the shiftiness of the clause, "she was able to dress and undress me": it is introduced as proof of Glumdalclitch's girlish handiness; but looking back on it from the vantage of the "although" material that follows, we must see it as proof of Gulliver's helplessness and, moreover, of his absurd demotion to the rank of a pet or a doll. We may notice further how the colorless word "either" intensifies Gulliver's actual humiliation.

Gulliver's conventional attitude recurs, nevertheless, throughout the whole passage. The statement, "and not above forty Foot high," in the last sentence conveys his condescension toward a sweet but touchingly under-

grown little girl, "not above" here corresponding to "almost" in Lilliput. "Being little for her Age" suggests further that Gulliver thinks of himself as a normal Brobdingnagian adult or, better perhaps, as an adult Englishman in a conventional English setting. We may also notice, a few sentences earlier, Gulliver's instinctively conventional retreat from the straightforward expression "seven Shirts" to the euphemistic "some other Linnen." His assertion that Glumdalclitch "was very good natured" we may also understand as conventional adult praise. If, however, our sense of the unconventionality of Gulliver's situation has remained clear, we will interpret it, rather, as Gulliver's admission of his tremendous good luck, since on his little nurse's good nature, as this very passage makes clear, every chance for his comfort and survival depends. Keeping the discrepancy between Gulliver's condition and his attitude before us, we find that the normally transparent English expression "with her own Hands" becomes an object of comic regard: consider the situation in which Glumdalclitch would use both "Hands" in washing his tiny shirts and underwear; and consider, further, the likelihood of her being about the task "constantly."

Here is one last passage from Gulliver's account of his life in Brobdingnag, his description of his image in a looking glass:

Neither indeed could I forbear smiling at my self, when the Queen used to place me upon her Hand towards a Looking-Glass, by which both our Persons appeared before me in full View together; and there could nothing be more ridiculous than the Comparison: So that I really began to imagine my self dwindled many Degrees below my usual Size.

The central point, I suppose, is that Gulliver gazes into the glass as a Brobdingnagian and gazes out of it as an Englishman. But notice, as a refinement on this absurd self-bifurcation, his use of the conventional expression, "our Persons." If one brings his sense to bear on the passage, he must see that the same term cannot be applied both to what Gulliver saw of himself and to what he saw of the Queen. Is Gulliver, once again, a liar, a misrepresenter of the true facts? Is he merely undone by the conventions of his language, by its plural number, its general term "person," and its common way of handling comparisons? Or was he actually unable to see what the mirror must have shown? In any case, insofar as we laugh at the inexactness of "our Persons," we are conscious of the pitiful Englishman who is looking out of the glass; insofar as we do not, we are conniving at the pretensions of the diminutive Brobdingnagian who looks into it.

I believe that many readers have sufficiently exercised their sense and their senses in reading the first two voyages of the *Travels* to catch the flavor of such passages as we have been studying. Similar passages in Houyhnhnmland, it seems to me, have been less sensibly considered. There are several obvious reasons for this: the less easy and less persistent physical focus for our sense; the obvious universal implications of the Houyhnhnm-human and Yahoo-human equations, which startle and disarm us in our

efforts to digest one particular aspect of them at a time; the more subtle and complex mixtures, first, of the conventional and the unconventional and, second, of the sensible and the absurd. The problems in the fourth voyage are, nevertheless, similar to those we have been studying, and they are also subject to the application of our plain good sense.

We have already taken steps toward a sensible judgment of Gulliver's assertion to the Portuguese seamen that he is "a poor *Yahoo*." Let us now take up his conduct when he first enters the home of the Houyhnhnms. On the basis of the two equine creatures he has just met, Gulliver infers "that a People who could so far civilize brute Animals, must needs excel in Wisdom all the Nations of the World." Then he prepares himself in the outer room to pay his respects to these incomparably wise and civilized people: "I waited in the second Room, and got ready my Presents, for the Master and Mistress of the House: They were two Knives, three Bracelets of false Pearl, a small Looking Glass and a Bead Necklace." Reason, we may say in excuse of Gulliver, is no match for habit. He had always used false pearls and bead necklaces to make his way with native peoples; we can hardly expect the oddity of the present situation and his reasonings on it to make him change. The failure is, after all, a common one, that of sticking to one's general practices even after undergoing an experience which renders them foolish. But, nevertheless, it is a failure which should make us suspect Gulliver's sense.

The separate expositions of Houyhnhnm intellect, which Gulliver reports with such uncritical satisfaction, also require close and continuous attention.<sup>17</sup> Consider, for example, this one:

*The Houyhnhnms* who came to visit my Master, out of a Design of seeing and talking with me, could hardly believe me to be a right *Yahoo*, because my Body had a different Covering from others of my Kind. They were astonished to observe me without the usual Hair or Skin, except on my Head, Face and Hands: but I discovered that Secret to my Master, upon an Accident, which happened about a Fortnight before.

They visited with the express design of *talking* with Gulliver, if we may believe him; but the reason they gave for believing that he was not "a right *Yahoo*" was "a different Covering from others of my Kind." And this different covering was apparently what they chiefly discussed. We plain human creatures may attempt to test qualities of conduct and spirit in making our judgments of fellow creatures—no horse, for example, is judged among us by his saddle. But among the naked folk of Houyhnhnm-land, clothes make the man. The Houyhnhnms show here the rhetoric of rationality: they believe one thing "because" of another. But for all this, it is not Gulliver's unusual mind and speech that chiefly astonish them, as it was in the case of the King;<sup>18</sup> it is the unusualness of his physical coverings, his having clothes and lacking hair. If we like, we may say they show reason here but not reason based on sense.

After the Master discovers the secret of Gulliver's clothes, his mind functions in much the same way as the other Houyhnhnms: "He said, it was plain I must be a perfect *Yahoo*; but that I differed very much from the rest of my Species, in the Whiteness, and Smoothness of my Skin, my want of Hair in several Parts of my Body, the Shape and Shortness of my Claws behind and before, and my Affectation of walking continually on my two hinder Feet." "He said" to Gulliver, we must notice, that it is Gulliver's skin, hair, body, claws, and gait—surely Swift is rubbing it in here—that chiefly distinguish him from the *Yahoos*; that he is otherwise a perfect *Yahoo*. No doubt the Brobdingnagian scholars would be satisfied with this judgment, but the King would not. The Master elsewhere gives a more nearly sensible judgment of Gulliver: "He was convinced (as he afterwards told me) that I must be a *Yahoo*, but my Teachableness, Civility and Cleanliness astonished him; which were Qualities altogether so opposite to those Animals. He was most perplexed about my Cloaths, reasoning sometimes with himself, whether they were a Part of my Body." Even here the emphasis is faulty, and soon the mind fails altogether.

Consider, again, the Master's dissertation on the unsuitableness of the human body "for employing . . . Reason in the common Offices of Life." The Master began, "if it were possible there could be any Country where *Yahoos* alone were endued with Reason, they certainly must be the governing Animal, because Reason will in Time always prevail against Brutal Strength." Then followed his critique of human physiognomy, during which he attacked human "fore Feet" as useless in locomotion and the placement of human eyes on the grounds that a man "could not look on either Side without turning [his] Head." But the most troubling part of this passage is its conclusion:

And lastly, that he observed every Animal in this Country naturally to abhor the *Yahoos*, whom the Weaker avoided, and the Stronger drove from them. So that supposing us to have the Gift of Reason, he could not see how it were possible to cure that natural Antipathy which every Creature discovered against us; nor consequently, how we could tame and render them serviceable.

We may begin by noticing the Master's failure of reasoning, his essential contradiction here of his opening assertion that reason would always prevail: his accumulated dislike of the human frame has made him forget what is actually the basic principle of Houyhnhnm conduct and Houyhnhnm pride. This closing statement is, furthermore, unreasonable in itself: it equates *Yahoo* and human, again, we may surmise, because of the immediately preceding concern with human physiognomy, neglecting the crucial difference between the *Yahoos* and humanity, with the tentative acknowledgment of which the Master began his speech and which the mere fact of his delivering it to Gulliver demonstrates. The last point he makes against the *Yahoos*, that other animals abhor them, obviously cannot be applied to

Gulliver—or, by extension, to the human race—since the Master and other Houyhnhnms have been cultivating him and since the Master is, indeed, entertaining him at this very moment in private conversation. The Master's speech, we may notice in retrospect, has been compromised from the beginning by his human-Yahoo equation. His failure to see that his conversation with Gulliver disallows this equation compounds his failures of reason with the failure of sense.

The Houyhnhnms have been dealt a hard case, an item of experience that resists their general categories, a recalcitrant exception to their notions, an object for which their language has no term. And they have not had sense enough to absorb it; they have not had the flexibility of intellect, the responsiveness of perception and reflection, the awareness of their own experiential limitations to modify their thoughts and actions to accommodate it: like the Brobdingnagian scholars, they simply rule Gulliver out of order. Much of Houyhnhnm conduct may furnish us useful examples for human betterment; and many comments of the Master on European civilization and on Yahoo behavior may, in one way or another, be truly representative of human failures—each thing must, once again, be determined on its own merits; but on the basis of the Houyhnhnm judgments that we have been examining, we should surely be skeptical of the claim of intellectual perfection that the Houyhnhnms make for themselves and that Gulliver echoes.

We have not looked at enough cases to make the kind of general definition of such central terms as "Gulliver," "Houyhnhnm," and "Yahoo" that critics like to make; but we have come far enough to make some comments on these terms: and we begin with the term "Gulliver."

It may be useful in trying to define "Gulliver" to recall the Locke-Stillingfleet controversy over the more general term "man," a controversy whose relevance to the *Travels* Rosalie Colie has demonstrated.<sup>19</sup> Locke, as Professor Colie has shown, tried vainly to elucidate for Bishop Stillingfleet the epistemological problem involved in one's coming to know any human being other than himself. Locke saw, as Stillingfleet apparently could not, that such knowledge cannot properly go beyond those experiential fragments that we catalogue in our minds under such a label as "John," "Peter," or "Thomas." Locke called this kind of obviously imperfect but practically necessary inference of other human identities by the expression, "nominal essence." What emerges from his teaching is the practical suggestion that to study and understand a certain human being other than oneself, one must, first, remain vigilant to every experience one has of him; second, never generalize except in the most tentative way, never expect to comprehend or even to ascertain his rational soul; and, finally, be ready to change all notions of this "Thomas" or "John" as one gets new additions of experience or a new understanding of old experience.

Gulliver himself seems to have been subject to the Stillingfleet mistake,

that is, to the tendency to believe that behind every human face, glimpsed however briefly, he can surely detect and perhaps understand a rational soul. Gulliver engages in this way of thinking when he returns from the voyage to Houyhnhnmland; in an odd way, however, since he relies on finding a rational soul not behind every human, but behind every equine, face. Thus he purchases for the sake of their conversation "two young Stone-horses," who, he assures us, although in a revealingly qualified way, "understand me tolerably well." It would not be amiss for us to take this as a warning.

Swift has, of course, given Gulliver many more signs of a human nature, many more items out of which we can infer his nominal human essence, than he gave to Gulliver's two equine friends. He has provided him with a number of family relationships, for example, and he has given him a memory. But the relationships never prevent Gulliver from going on a new voyage; and the narrator's memory Swift has virtually confined to the recall of separate circumstances. Gulliver has also been endowed with a number of abilities, such as his gift for languages, and, most important, with a consistently clear and circumstantial style of discourse. But none of these should blind us to the discreteness, the disjunctiveness of the evidence we may lump under the name "Gulliver." The name itself, as has been widely recognized, is never used in the body of the *Travels* and may have been pinned onto the narrator after the work was actually finished. In the work, moreover, the narrator's name variously shifts and vanishes in a way analogous to that in which his physical and intellectual presence shifts and vanishes: he is called "Quinbus Flestrin" in Lilliput, and "Grildrig" in Brobdingnag; he has no name in Laputa, and in Houyhnhnmland he seems to be denominated merely as "wonderful Yahoo" and "gentle Yahoo." Swift has further minimized the identity, the apparent essence, of this figure by avoiding almost all mention of his Christian religion and his Christian soul.

It may be worth while to notice a number of emotional aspects with which Swift could easily have endowed Gulliver, aspects that would have given him a novelistic integrity of character, that he in fact denied him. Gulliver is never shown as feeling love, although he is described as married, as having children and, once, as allegedly involved in an adulterous affair. Nor does Swift ever draw us into terror, that most communicable of human sympathies, as he might have done on many occasions. Swift has kept this compelling emotion out of his account partly by the meticulous use of the past tense—the narrator is obviously here now, telling about his being tied down in Lilliput—and partly by the use of his plain, circumstantial mode of discourse. One cannot go on, however, telling what is *not* in the *Travels*. Suffice it to say that Swift has taken great pains to avoid projecting a figure who could attract novelistic sympathies and to present us, rather, with a vast congeries of individual human manifestations, all separately

subject to our scrutiny and judgment and each separately attributable to "Gulliver."

It may be questioned whether we should bother to acknowledge "Gulliver," whether we should spend any time searching out even his nominal essence. Certainly, anyone who attempts it should begin by recognizing that the separate elements of action and assertion, all of which must be accounted for in this definition, are much more various, much more equivocal, and much more rapid in their shifts than those that characterize the actual individuals of our acquaintance or those that characterize such novelistic individuals as Elizabeth Bennet or Captain Tobias Shandy. Professor Raymond Smith, although his language reveals a drag toward the Stillingfleet inference, has given copious illustration of the "pure pliance" of Swift's narrator, asserting, with a trace of misplaced sympathy, that "Gulliver is exploited, manipulated at every turn."<sup>20</sup> Again, he writes that Gulliver is "a creature . . . to which notions of development, or consistency, are irrelevant." Kathleen Williams has also suggested the true and proper grounds for a consideration of Gulliver, describing the figure as "purely satiric"—by which she must have the farrago implications of satire in mind: the figure is, she asserts, "given as many characteristics, consistent or not, as his inventor requires for that purpose [the purpose of satire, that is], or he may from time to time disappear altogether."<sup>21</sup>

But what is the use of Gulliver if he is so flimsy and so fading an individual presence? This figure provides Swift with a handy individual humanity, in either the aspect of judgment or action, whenever such a human presence will enrich his book. Gulliver, as narrator, is always subject to immediate and unobtrusive recall. With a single term or phrase or with a gesture of participation, Gulliver can be readmitted to our attention, forcing us to judge not merely a situation but a human attitude toward that situation and, it may be, an active human involvement as well. We may remember the description of the experiments in the academy at Lagado, during which the narrator is largely invisible, but materializes now and again—to be hugged by the student of excrement, to be "convinced" by the cobweb expert, to depart from the bellows practitioner without submitting his own "small Fit of the Cholick" to his ministrations—in each case sharpening our sense of the experiment before us. Gulliver's description of the "great Gate" in Lilliput, his disappointment at the height of the architecture in Brobdingnag, and his closing statement of partial reconciliation to "the Yahoo-kind," during all of which his presence is persistently felt, require us chiefly to consider Gulliver's intellectual attitude, to judge his sense—or nonsense. His leap over the cow dung and his first meeting with the Portuguese sailors, which are described in a prevailingly transparent or, as we may say, sensible way, require us to judge Gulliver's actions. Often, of course, as in the description of his conduct before the looking glass and the



account of his relationship with Pedro de Mendez, we judge both the understanding of the narrator and the conduct of the actor at once.

But why then, it may be asked, if Gulliver's tremendous variety in nature and in mode is the proper production of a human presence for such an analytical, sense-based work as this, are there such signs of integrity, such promptings or, at least, such a tolerance of the Stillingfleet inference? The impression of *one* human being, as Swift has sketched it in, intensifies the problem of sense. Judging this sturdy, circumstantial Englishman to be terribly proud one moment, we will have trouble conceiving him to be terribly humble the next; and, if we follow the evidence that far, we will have still worse trouble following him in the next moment back to pride. The impression of Gulliver's integrity, insofar as Swift has imposed it on his readers, thus complicates and enhances their problem of judging Gulliver sensibly in each changing moment of the book.

Consider, for example, the passage in which Gulliver describes how he made and stocked the boat in which he was to leave Houyhnhnmland:

Let it suffice to say, that in six Weeks time, with the Help of the Sorrel Nag, who performed the Parts that required most Labour, I finished a Sort of *Indian Canoo*; but much larger, covering it with the Skins of *Yahoos*, well stitched together, with hempen Threads of my own making. My Sail was likewise composed of the Skins of the same Animal; but I made use of the youngest I could get; the older being too tough and thick; and I likewise provided myself with four Paddles. I laid in a Stock of boiled Flesh, of Rabbits and Fowls; and took with me two Vessels, one filled with Milk, and the other with Water.

Trying, as we naturally do, to entertain the idea of Gulliver as an integrated human being will make it extremely difficult for us to respond to the remarkable shifts in attitude this passage suggests. If, for example, Gulliver is a real and admitted Yahoo—and that is, after all, why he must make this boat—his use of “the skins of *Yahoos*” to make his sail is frightful, inhuman, one might say. But if *Yahoos* are animals the skins of which may legitimately be thus used, what business has this Yahoo in making an “*Indian Canoo*?” But, then, to shift back again, if he is taking meat, a kind of food *Yahoos* eat and Houyhnhnms do not, he must be something of a Yahoo—and yet not, we may decide, remembering that he probably caught this meat with “Springes made of *Yahoos* Hairs.” At any rate, when we get down to the self-admitted English Yahoo plugging the chinks of his Indian canoe with “*Yahoo* Tallow,” we must surely pause a moment in our contemplation of the man Gulliver, like the King of Brobdingnag on a less vexing occasion, in unconcealed astonishment. Swift wanted to see or, rather, he wanted *us* to see for ourselves how far we could go, on the one hand, in maintaining the common notion of individual integrity, Gulliver's, of course, and, on the other hand, in making sense out of a range and a shiftiness of human conduct beyond what anyone has to experience in any individual human nature.

Gulliver's apparent identity, then, enriches the sense of the book and intensifies the individual reader's involvement in it. If we attempt, however, to abstract a consistent general nature from the multiplicity of the materials Swift has attached to this figure, if we try to argue that Gulliver is a sensible or a foolish, an honest or a mendacious, a fine or an ordinary, man, or if we try to identify him in some organic scheme of development, we will blind ourselves again and again to the precise quality of separate manifestations of Gulliver and to the full variety of the active and intellectual participation of individual humanity which Swift has, by the use of this variegated figure, infused into his work. To define the man Gulliver means to diminish the figure Gulliver; and to make any definition work, one must misjudge, often to the point of absurdity, some or other of Gulliver's actions and attitudes.

The nature of Gulliver has probably caused the greatest and most serious difficulties to students of the *Travels*. But the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos are troublesome too. Actually each term presents or, rather, focuses on its own special kinds of questions, which, however, Gulliver's assertion of an opposition between the two tends to disguise. Gulliver's giddy oscillation between the explicit admission that he is a Yahoo and the implicit conviction that he is a Houyhnhnm may lead us to balance the two figures, taking the Yahoos to represent human nature bereft of the rational faculty and the Houyhnhnms to represent human nature bereft of the physical affections; and this is, of course, partially true. But the main question focused in the Yahoos is really the broad question of humanity at large: that is, are the Yahoos, at one point after the other, human or non-human, and are humans Yahoo or non-Yahoo? The question focused in the Houyhnhnms is the narrower one of human (or, at any rate, created) intelligence: that is, are the Houyhnhnms, in each separate exercise of their minds, both sensible and reasonable, or are they imperfectly so? As such questions should suggest, Swift's employment of these two fabulous figures is quite different: the inarticulate Yahoos he holds stable, maintaining them as a possible image of degraded humanity for the sake of a variety of comparisons; the voluble and discursive Houyhnhnms are, on the other hand, flexibly employed, speaking and acting sometimes in one fashion and sometimes in another. Neither set of questions, however, is soluble in general; nor is our problem to reach a general definition of "Yahoo" or "Houyhnhnm." Swift did not care and could not have cared about these fictions of his art. Of course, Gulliver cared mightily, and we must often confront his confidence, on the one hand, that he is really a Houyhnhnm and, on the other, that he is a perfect Yahoo. Our task with regard to these figures themselves, however, is to learn as much as we can from studying them about the nature of real, human creatures.

Let us consider the Houyhnhnms first. When they are reasonable and when their reasoning is based on sense, as is much of what the Master says

about European civilization, they fade from sight, merely giving with their prestige for honesty and rationality a luster and a force to judgments obviously focused on civilized humankind as we all know it. When Houyhnhnm intelligence fails or fails in part, we learn about or participate in the limitations of the created intelligence. Sometimes Swift shows the necessary dependence of reason on sense: with Houyhnhnm opinions on Gulliver's nature for example; with the Master's dislike of Gulliver's "fore feet"; and with the Houyhnhnm consensus that he is a dangerous Yahoo. Sometimes Swift uses these insulated beings to suggest the mere limitations of such creaturely intelligence as we humans possess, to show the narrowness of its imaginative range and the meagerness of its contents—as with the Master's inability to conceive of lying or boats or Europe or any land in which the greatest intelligence is vested in bodies other than those like his.

Swift uses the speechless Yahoos, naturally, in a very different way from the Houyhnhnms. These physically impressive figures never fade, as the physical presence of the Houyhnhnms is often wont to do. When Yahoos resemble human beings—in getting drunk, in prizing bright stones, in flirtation, and in appetite; or when humans resemble Yahoos—as Gulliver naked does to some extent—the obviously satiric focus on humankind gains a powerful emphasis. When we reject or partially reject a resemblance, and here we are obviously on the grounds of individual interpretation, our illuminations are rather hard to pin down. If we reject a human-Yahoo resemblance enunciated by Gulliver or the Master, we are engaging at least partially in a judgment of intelligence, that is, in a judgment against the intelligence of Gulliver or the Master. In cases of a merely possible resemblance, however, during the Master's recital of several odd Yahoo traits, for example, we find the focus directed on our own intelligence, on our own sense and reason. We must decide on the degree and range of similarity: "that's like women, true enough," one may say; and, again, "that's like my wife"; and, finally, "I have acted like that now and then, I must admit." Different individuals will make different judgments of the congruence between human conduct and that of the Yahoos, based on their personal experience of others and their knowledge of themselves. I would only suggest that either the decision of total identity—and I have talked at length with graduate students who longed to wallow in this—or the decision of no resemblance—*both* of which decisions Gulliver makes at different times and to different degrees of explicitness—show a failure of sense, a failure to struggle one detail at a time with the Yahoo-human resemblance.

#### IV. A FEW GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

"The chief end . . . in all my labors," Swift wrote to Pope soon after completing the *Travels*, "is to vex the world rather than divert it"; that is, as

Pope would have understood, to instruct the people of the world by vexing them. This vexatious instruction, as Swift explained, involves the demonstration that man is only *animal rationis capax*. Upon the great foundation of this lesson, Swift asserted, if I have correctly followed the slippery connections in his letter, "the whole building of my *Travels* is erected; and I never will have peace of mind til all honest men are of my opinion. By consequence [he continues] you are to embrace it immediately, and procure that all who deserve my esteem may do so too. The matter is so clear that it will admit of no dispute." The exact modulation of tone here is not determinable: did the ironic urge overtake Swift before or after "all honest men"?<sup>22</sup> That his position on the complex problem of human rationality must be embraced immediately, that Pope should "procure" disciples, and that the matter admits of no dispute constitute, at all events, a brief essay in Gulliver's vein. Swift is actually acknowledging the fact that men will take time to reflect on the series of human imperfections, vices, and follies he has displayed and that they will dispute about the relevance of this display. On the other hand, we may detect through the irony Swift's desire for all men to reach a common sense on this question at last or, to modify as Swift does, for all honest men to do so. In his letter to Pope, Swift concluded his statement on the *Travels*, "I will hold a hundred pounds that you and I agree in the point."

The conventionality and lucidity of Swift's language and the easy accessibility to ordinary understandings of his fictional materials would seem to give every honest reader a chance to make sense out of the *Travels*. Dr. Johnson's complaint, "When once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest," although unjust to the richness and diversity of Swift's design, properly suggests the availability to common sense of the style and the substance of Swift's composition. Johnson no doubt benefited, moreover, from Swift's regard for ordinary good sense:<sup>23</sup> he surely kept in mind such salient pieces of experiential information as the relative sizes of the Lilliputians, Gulliver, and the Brobdingnagians and brought them into his imagination on every proper occasion, easily resolving the vexatious disharmony between the remote experiences and the conventional language which we have been studying. And Pope also may have enjoyed a transparent access to this disharmony and enjoyed it in comfortable detachment as a comic diversion. But how many others can claim so reliable a comprehension of the *Travels* as Johnson and Pope may have had?

Except for his giving a lucid exposition of these manifold experiences, experiences by which we may test almost every general concern of human nature and human society, Swift has abandoned us. Rather, he has entrusted us to an apparently limited and unreliable guide. Naturally, then, we must struggle if we are to advance through the vexation of a misapprehension or an incomplete understanding of things to the diversion we will

enjoy as we come more and more fully to understand them. There is another difficulty in the *Travels* too, and that is the virtual inexhaustibility of its meanings and relevance. Coping with this book involves an analytical address that leads from the single adventure to the single sentence and from the single phrase to the single word—even to such colorless words, sometimes, as “great,” “either,” and “almost.” And every analytical step reveals new varieties of meaning, new possibilities of interpretation. The interwoven details of the *Travels* are thus rooted in human experience and human nature so richly and so variously that we can never simply and finally comprehend them. We can never, then, safely escape the vexation of Swift’s satiric design. Nor, by the same token, can we ever exhaust its comic diversion.

As the reader struggles on, trying to make sense out of one detail of Gulliver’s account after another, trying to grasp the patterns of relationship among these details, and trying to relate his sense of them to his sense of himself and of all human life, he may feel more strongly the vexation of new uncertainty or the diversion of new understanding. There is no doubt, however, that the diversion is problematical, undeclared, always to be achieved again, whereas the vexation is persistent and pervasive, the actually created surface of the *Travels*. And the force of this inexhaustible vexation, this inescapable instruction, which Swift has provided the world, is this: that the reader is himself *animal rationis capax*, that he himself is an animal who at any moment and in confronting even the most obvious challenge to his understanding can fail, can fall into absurdity. Each of us may escape from this vexatious lesson again and again and emerge again and again into the realm of comedy, laughing at Gulliver or the Master or ourselves of a moment before. Swift would no doubt be pleased at this. But the inexhaustible variety of his satiric challenge to our good sense persists after any and every comical diversion; and the vexation goes on.

## NOTES

1. The term “sense” is used throughout this essay in accordance with the empirical teaching alluded to in this paragraph. By “sense” I will mean “knowledge derived from experience and observation,” or “the capacity to derive such knowledge.” Sensible language, then, is language used to communicate this empirically derived knowledge; and sensible conduct is conduct based upon it.

2. For convenience, I have derived all my quotations of the *Travels* from *Gulliver’s Travels*, ed. Robert A. Greenberg (New York, 1970).

3. The subscription *Splendide Mendax*, affixed to the portrait in the front of the 1735 Dublin edition of *Gulliver’s Travels*, an edition which had Swift’s approval, comes from Horace’s *Odes*, III, xi, 35: it describes the one faithful wife, “una de multis face nuptiali / digna periturum fuit in parentem / splendide mendax et in omne virgo / nobilis aevum.” The application to Gulliver, who does not lie to save a mate’s life nor lie to a false parent, is ambiguous. One who

did not recall Horace might gather the meaning "brilliantly lying," or, interpreting the expression as a virtual adjective-noun combination in accordance with the natural prompting of the portrait, "splendid [or merely "big"?] liar." In the magazine *Common Sense*, published in 1737-1739, *Mendax* is used as the proper name of a correspondent.

4. Swift's self-conscious employment of language variously to clarify, disguise, and color matters of fact has been acknowledged often: see, for example, Denis Donoghue, *Jonathan Swift* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 142; W. B. Carnochan, *Lemuel Gulliver's Mirror for Man* (Berkeley, 1968), especially pp. 155 and 171; and Maurice J. Quinlan, "Swift's use of Literalization as a Rhetorical Device," *PMLA*, 82 (1967), 516-521.

5. Readers who believe that Swift might advocate this response to the death of a beloved friend or mate might study the evidence of his private life, especially that furnished by the poem he wrote for Stella's birthday in 1727, less than a year before her death and less than a year after the publication of the *Travels*. Again, they might look at the famous "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," especially the first two hundred and fifty lines which describe the varieties of composure, in many cases a composure quite Houyhnhnm-like, with which friends and foes will greet the news of Swift's own death.

6. Donoghue, *Jonathan Swift*, pp. 142-143.

7. Kathleen Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise* (Lawrence, 1968), pp. 213, 107, and 144.

8. Ellen Leyburn, *Satiric Allegory: Mirror of Man* (New Haven, 1956), p. 76; see also Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise*, p. 119—where she asserts that "Swift is never abstract."

9. Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse* (New Haven, 1959), pp. 1-36 and, especially, 3-5; W. E. Yeomans, "The Houyhnhnm as Menippean Horse," *College English*, 27 (1966), 452. See William H. Halewood, "Gulliver's Travels, I, vi," *ELH*, 33 (1966), 422-433, for a detailed account of one case of Swift's compositional disjunctiveness.

10. A review in *Philological Quarterly*, 43 (1964), 392.

11. Donoghue, *Jonathan Swift*, pp. 11-19; and Edward Rosenheim, Jr., "The Fifth Voyage of Lemuel Gulliver," *Modern Philology*, 60 (1962), 103-119.

12. F. R. Leavis, "The Irony of Swift," in *The Common Pursuit* (New York, 1952), p. 86. The best suggestion in this essay, however, and the one most central to my discussion of the *Travels* is this, that Swift's irony has as its special "function . . . to defeat habit." Gulliver's language inspires habitual responses which the facts of his experience defeat or, at least, may defeat.

13. Frank Brady, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Gulliver's Travels* (Englewood Cliffs, 1968), p. 47.

14. See Robert M. Ryley, "Gulliver, Flimnap's Wife, and the Critics," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 5 (1972), 53-64, for an excellent analysis of the kind I am here advocating.

15. A very few paragraphs later Gulliver reports that the King, on hearing him discourse in a rational manner, "could not conceal his Astonishment."

16. Such counterpointing of discrepancies in conduct or in terminology is a common element of Swift's art. In describing the Houyhnhnms' comparison of Gulliver to a Yahoo, for example, Swift has closely juxtaposed "Fore-feet" and "Hands" and, just a little later, "Hoof" and "Hand"; and in the same passage his narrator yokes together two explanations for the flatness of savage human countenances, one of which indicates the groveling, earthbound aspect of human life and the other of which recalls the human capacity for affection, tenderness, and personal responsibility.

17. See John H. White, "Swift's Trojan Horses," *English Language Notes*, 3 (1966), 185-194, for a sensible and well-balanced discussion of Houyhnhnm intelligence.

18. James Burnet, Lord Monboddo, opened his massive work, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1773): "As the use of speech is supposed to be that which chiefly distinguishes us from the brute creation; and is truly so . . ."—nearly fifty years too late to help the Houyhnhnms, of course; but, as the style of the statement shows, the principle had been an item of British common sense, at least, for a long time.

19. Rosalie Colie, "Gulliver, the Locke-Stillingfleet Controversy, and the Nature of Man," *History of Ideas Newsletter*, 2 (1956), 58-62; also see Irvin Ehrenpreis, "The Meaning of Gulliver's Last Voyage," *Review of English Literature*, 3 (1962), 18-38.

20. "The 'Character' of Lemuel Gulliver," *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, 10 (1965), 133-139.

21. Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise*, p. 131. Also see Donoghue, *Jonathan Swift*, pp. 162-163, for a description of Gulliver that is precisely in harmony with Locke's teaching of the nominal essence.

22. To sharpen our eyes to the irony here, we might recall Swift's statement to Charles Ford about the *Travels*, in *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford, 1963), II, 87: "they are admirable Things, and will wonderfully mend the World."

23. To see, however, how high Swift's praise that someone has "sense" really is, see the *Correspondence*, II, 360; III, 196; III, 230; III, 289; and III, 311.